

Brilliance

by a malady of dreaming

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Summary: There was no day in Nargothrond, nor any night. Celegorm and Curufin live in a haunted city.

Brilliance

There was no day in Nargothrond, nor any night. There were only candles and torches and lamps of white brilliance that flooded caverns of rock and caused shadows to run upwards to high ceilings resting beneath the ground. It was a city that Dwarves would find comforting â€“ a gutted riverbank. Below it the river ran, chortling ceaselessly; the roar of it filled the city and set the floor humming.

Orodreth sat in the grey twilight. On the table beside him a lamp stood, glowing a soft white that did not quite reach the corners of the room but made his hands appear almost translucent. He could see the veins running green beneath his skin and the grey bones of his fingers curled tight around the golden crown his uncle Felagund had given him.

When he first took the crown off his head to contemplate it he would have said that it shone beautifully in the light, but now the shine had become commonplace; he could deconstruct it. There was a strip of white running up the centre of the band, lined by two stripes of pale yellow. Surrounding these were two broader bands of gold, which grew darker, but the very top of the band was white again, and the very bottom was a deep brown. The gleam of gold was just a stack of colour. If he turned the crown this way or that, it would flash, and he would call it beautiful, but if he held it fast once more, he would see the stripes again, and they were not lovely.

He placed the crown on his lap. His legs were bare. He had removed most of his clothing some time ago in preparation for bed, but he had not gone to bed. He had watched his crown, and the hours had slipped past, perhaps the hours of night, or maybe even the hours of day. He

did not know how long he had been sitting there. He felt cold, but the crown was pinning him down. It was too heavy. Dwarves had made it. It was supposed to be light, like the NauglamÃ-r, but its weight was crushing.

In the bed his wife stirred; she had slept. Her dark hair was spilling over the pillows, running over her throat. She had one arm over her head, crooked. In green she was dressed, a dark green like bitter leaves. Her fingers fluttered, and she reached for the blankets, drawing them to cover her breasts and round shoulders. Her dreams flickered on the edge of his mind â€“ leaves drenched in sunlight, almost golden, a blue sky, and water running. He had kissed her beneath those leaves, drawn her breath from her, and she had taken it back again. Upon her shoulders and her arms he had pressed his lips and his devotion; she had dazzled him with her dark eyes and strong soul, and together they had fallen to the grass and held each other until the day fled and night grew old.

'Good Morrow.' Curufin stood in the doorway, head bent slightly. His hair was falling over the right side of his face, partially hiding his glittering eye.

Orodreth bowed his head in greeting. His body was stiff from sitting, and his neck was sore. 'Good Morrow.' He gave a slight smile. 'Do you know the time?'

'It is an hour 'til dawn.' Curufin stepped into the room. 'Is your wife sleeping?'

'Yes.'

'And you are not?'

'I was not tired.' Orodreth looked down at the crown lying across his legs. The stripes had melded together again, and the crown was beautiful.

Curufin stopped in front of Orodreth so close that their knees touched; their feet were placed together, one foot and then the other, Orodreth's naked feet and Curufin's in leather shoes wrapped and buttoned around his ankles â€“ black and white stripes on the grey floor.

'I wanted to talk to you,' Curufin said. 'I was hoping you would be awake.' His velvet leggings brushed against Orodreth's legs. He was swaying slightly, leaning in on Orodreth. Orodreth looked up at him. Curufin's hair was shimmering across his face, untucked now on both sides.

'What did you wish to talk about?'

'Nothing, really,' Curufin said. 'Just a general conversation.' He grabbed Orodreth by the chin and shoved his head back. He stared down into his eyes. 'Do you ever get so lonely you feel like someone just reached into you with a spoon and scraped out your soul?'

Orodreth reached up and brushed Curufin's hair back, tucked it behind his ears. The light cut a stripe of white down the side of his face. 'Are you all right?' he asked.

Curufin seized Orodreth's hand and held it so tightly that his fingers squeezed together and turned pink at the tips, like a spray of flowers. Curufin's lips trembled; his eyes were wild, and the light in them quivered.

'I,' he said, and then dropped Orodreth's hand. He reached down and touched the crown, running his finger round and round inside it, brushing the inner band. 'What do you think?' he said. 'Or do you think?'

'I am sorry,' Orodreth said. 'You must miss your family.'

'You do think.' Curufin smiled.

'Yes.'

In the bed Orodreth's wife stirred. She sighed in her sleep and turned over. Curufin drummed his fingers against the crown, started to circle it again.

'You do think,' he said, 'but you don't know. You have no idea.' He was still circling the crown; with his other hand he played with Orodreth's hair, twisting it around his fingers, pulling it this way and that. 'You never saw the light, so you don't understand.' His voice was a rough whisper. 'Do you?'

Orodreth shook his head. 'You are speaking of your oath?'

Curufin tapped Orodreth's nose. 'You think very well for someone with no idea. Does that make you proud?'

'No, it does not make me proud. I make me worry: I think that you need help.'

'Do I?'

'Yes.' Orodreth tried to wet his lips with his dry tongue. 'You are upset. Please, talk to me, as you wished to. Tell me what is wrong. What troubles you? There is a darkness in your eyes.'

'Yes,' said Curufin. 'There is a shadow. It has haunted me. You know it, but you do not understand.'

'Let me help.'

'You cannot help.' He smiled. 'No, you cannot help more than you have already done.'

'What do you mean?' Orodreth asked. 'What have I done?'

Curufin touched Orodreth's hair and lifted it from his neck. He stared at it at for a moment and then dropped it. 'What would you do if your uncle died,' he said, flatly.

Orodreth did not dare to meet his gaze. He stared at Curufin's chest; his scarlet shirt and moving hand were making him dizzy. 'I would grieve, as I have grieved before, for my uncle, for my father.'

'Yes,' said Curufin, and he stopped circling the crown. He lifted it

and placed it on Orodreth's head. 'You would grieve.' He took Orodreth's face between his hands and kissed his forehead. 'Try to rest.' He smiled and then parted as silently as he had come.

Orodreth looked again to the bed. His wife had not woken. Beneath him the river hummed.

* * *

><p>Curufin hurried through the winding passageways of Nargothrond. The place was chilled from drafts impossible to block. Morning was rising beyond the river, but its light did not reach past the doors.</p>

'Good Morrow, Lord Curufin,' a passing soldier said.

'Yes,' Curufin muttered as he moved past him. He kept his head bent, hoping he would not be recognized again. He had no need for greetings or conversation. Orodreth's face shown in his memory – eyes too large and chin too narrow, almost white hair touching almost white skin, knees trembling.

He knocked on Celeborn's door before opening it. Celeborn was sprawled across the right side of his bed; the red blankets were a mess and halfway on the floor. The other half of the bed was empty. Huan now slept beside LÃ°thien.

Curufin sat down on the bed near Celeborn and undid his shoes. He dropped them on the floor, and then yanked the heavy blankets up. Celeborn started awake and rolled over and grabbed Curufin, pinning him beneath him. Instinct was sharp in him. He always feared.

'It is I! It is I!' Curufin cried.

Celeborn released him and dropped back onto the mattress. 'Yes, so I see.'

The room was lit faintly by a covered lantern that sat on a brass table by the bed. It vomited shadows up across the vaulted ceiling and down across the octagonal marble tiles that shimmered orange and grey on the floor. The bedding was rich – scarlet dyed and embroidered with gold thread.

Curufin leaned into Celeborn, throwing an arm and a leg over him. 'Hold me,' he said.

Putting both arms around his younger brother, Celeborn drew him on top of him. Curufin lay there, feeling Celeborn's heart beating in his chest. He lay his head on his shoulder, and Celeborn brushed his hair off his face, moved to press his chin to the top of Curufin's head.

'Did you have a nightmare?'

'No.' Curufin closed his eyes and tried to remember far enough into the past to a time when he still had nightmares. Now his dreams were cold and grey. He woke each morning believing, for a brief moment, that he had died, only to find that it was not so. It made him sick. 'I talked to Orodreth.'

Celegorm's grip on him tightened minutely. Curufin could feel a sudden hardening of the muscles in his arms and jaw. His neck was now taught. 'Why?'

'I know naught.' He rubbed Celegorm's shoulder, trying to soothe him, but he stiffened more. 'I wanted to see him, I suppose. He is, after all, still our family somehow, in a way.'

Celegorm pushed sharply to the right and Curufin fell underneath him. Celegorm's face was in shadow, only a bit of light from the lantern shown through the hair spilling over his face and around Curufin's. The varying shadows over his face made it look punctured.

'Are you losing your nerve, little brother?'

Curufin could not see Celegorm's eyes. They were black holes beneath the lighter ridge of his brow. He smelt almost musty, like he had been sitting too long among dust in damp places. His muscles were still tight, and his fingers were gripping Curufin's arm painfully. One of Celegorm's legs rested between his own, and Celegorm held his weight upon him, effectively pinning him to the mattress, which sunk beneath the two. Celegorm's hip dug into his stomach.

'No.' Curufin pushed up at him, but Celegorm did not relent. His fingers would leave marks. 'Brother, please.'

Celegorm released his arm, but did not let him up. He ran his fingers through his hair, pushing it up and off his face. 'We swore,' he murmured. 'We swore.'

'I know. I know. I promise. I am not going to fail you.'

Celegorm's eyes glinted as he watched him, then he put an arm beneath Curufin's back and pulled him up towards him, sitting them both up. Curufin shivered in the cold air of the room, and Celegorm rubbed his arm. It still ached.

'He has no idea,' said Curufin. 'None, none at all.' He smiled weakly, picked at the crumpled blankets.

Celegorm nodded. 'He is a fool.'

'Yes,' said Curufin. 'And fools must pay for their foolishness as the wise pay for their wisdom and the strong pay for their strength. But we have paid for our haste,' he said. 'We have paid a thousand times over.' He looked up at Celegorm. He could see his face now, his strong jaw and sharp cheeks, his firm lips and thick, low eyebrows over green-grey eyes. 'I am cold.'

Celegorm put a blanket over his shoulders and got up. He had never been one to laze in bed once woken. Now he dressed quickly in the still air. He found a brush and drew it over his hair a few times, pulled it back and bound it.

Curufin sat watching him, the blanket held fast around him. 'Where are you going?'

Celegorm pulled on a light jacket and fastened the buttons. 'To see LÃ°thien.'

'Again?'

Celegorm nodded as he pulled the jacket straight.

Curufin got up, still holding the blanket about him. 'Don't,' he said. 'Not now. Stay with me.'

'Go see your son if you need comfort.'

'I do not need comfort. I need warmth. The cold of this place has buried itself beneath my skin and made my bones brittle. The dark of this place has sought a way into my mind and clouded my head. The dank of this place has found a way into my nose and set up house there reminding me always of dirt and decay. We are living like worms here, wriggling our way through tunnels in the soil.'

'There are many who have spoken of the beauty of Nargothrond,' said Celegorm.

'I hate it.'

'Then do not stay.' Celegorm strode from the room, leaving the door wide open behind him. People were moving now through the halls beneath the arched ceilings splendidly carved. Tall pillars stood throughout the city, and torches gleamed in their places sending light along the curved walls.

Celegorm's feet rang on the coloured tiles as he hurried through one of the main halls. He was greeted, and replied courteously. He smiled at the people of the city as he passed them.

He saw Finduilas with two of her friends; they were not much more than pretty slips of children. Orodreth had told him that Finduilas was seeing someone. He had said she might soon be engaged. Here she stood laughing playing skip rope, hair falling golden to her waist. She waved at him as he passed, and he waved back. She whispered to her friends, and they all shook laughing.

He wondered who wished to marry her. If he were as young as she. If he would last the wars and the years. He wondered if she would.

He moved away from people, following a way into the city where few went. Here they kept LÃ°thien, allowing no one else to speak to her. Isolation would wear her down. She would grow tired of her Beren with his wild ways and scruff face, his wandering life and mortality. She would see reason.

He found her where he had left her the night before. She was sitting on her bed, petting Huan's head. Huan had his head resting on her lap; his eyes were closed contentedly. She was stroking his ears, kept bending to kiss him. She looked unreal, impossibly beautiful. Her nose was small, turned up a tad at the end. She had high cheeks and long lashes that sent slight, twisting shadows down her face. She had captured a galaxy in her eyes.

'Good morning,' Celegorm greeted.

LÃ°thien raised her head. Her short black hair was curling in at the ends, making a little frame around her face. 'I will not marry you,'

she said darkly. 'I will leave here and find Beren.' She crossed her arms over her chest. 'And your dog likes me more than he likes you.'

'My dog is guarding you,' said Celegorm. 'And making sure you do not try to escape.'

LÃ°thien continued to watch him. There was no fear in her eyes. 'You will let me go.'

'No,' said Celegorm. He looked at Huan, who watched him suspiciously. Celegorm smiled at him, and Huan thumped his tail a couple of times before turning back to LÃ°thien and nuzzling his nose against her knee.

'I have sent messengers to your father,' said Celegorm, 'urging him to give me your hand in marriage. He will see the necessity, if you do not.'

'I will never marry you,' said LÃ°thien. 'For I will never love you. You shall let me go at once.'

'We shall see,' he said and stepped into the room.

Huan lifted his head and bared his teeth. Celegorm stopped where he was, and Huan watched him.

LÃ°thien looked from Huan to Celegorm. 'He guards me well,' she said. There was laughter in her voice.

'Yes.' Celegorm kept his voice level.

'Will you not go after and guard your cousin?' said LÃ°thien. 'You have had no word from Felagund, and it may be that he is lying in peril. Do you not wish to rescue him?'

'We have had word. He is well.'

She shook her head; her hair brushed softly across her cheeks. 'You are lying.'

Celegorm's lips twisted into perhaps a smile. He could not tell. 'There is no such thing as rescue in this world any longer. You would know that if you had seen such as I have seen. You were born into a world of hope and safety, and it was not marred. You did not have light to lose.'

'Let me go,' said she.

'But this world was not built on hope,' said Celegorm. 'It was built on pain, jealousy, pride, and strength. Only these will help you.'

'You took lessons from a cruel teacher.'

'Yes,' he answered. 'And I have learned. You have not.'

The candles flickered along the wall, but the air was still.

She watched him with unmoved eyes. 'You will release me, or I shall

leave. You cannot hold me.'

'Try what you will,' he said. 'It is the strong that win. If you win, it is because you were strong, or had the help of the strong. Victory is the defeat of the weak. There is no other answer.' He turned.

'Come, Huan.'

But Huan did not follow.

* * *

><p>By the light of torches Celegorm sat. The stone chair leeched cold into his body, and his hands lay stiff. He closed his eyes, but by light or by dark he could not remember them. Now the Silmarils were just a name â€“ a promise unattainable. An image crept at the edge of his thoughts, but would not enter his mind. It hovered at the corners, mocking him: light so beautiful he would kill for it, and then kill again â€“ something holy worth a sword through the guts, eyes wide, and lips red with wet, dripping blood.</p>

Still, he could not remember them. He saw his father's eyes, wild, terrified. Everything was slipping away from him. The world was broken. And FÃ«anÃ¡ro rose up like a geyser from the shattered earth and promised them revenge. In the light of torches they drew their swords and swore. He remembered how red the fire was. How Maitimo's eyes sparked. How CurufinwÃ«'s lips were parted as he breathed in the smoke. Their eyes were scratchy, and their lungs burnt. FindekÃ¡no stood in silence, wishing to leave, but FindarÃ¡to spoke against FÃ«anÃ¡ro while desire burnt his soul. Now he lay dying somewhere.

'What are you thinking of, Uncle?' Celebrimbor stood beside a pillar. He seemed to have formed himself from the very shadows he stood in. He was dressed in grey, and his dark eyes sought an answer in Celegorm's face.

'I am thinking,' said Celegorm, 'of our ineluctable doom.' He smiled up at Celebrimbor. 'And how to avoid it.'

'Such hope,' Celebrimbor said. He leaned slightly backwards, and the shadows consumed him.

'Yes.'

Finrod Felagund would soon be spent and join the growing list of the dead. Celegorm had seen this doom in his eyes when he had agreed to follow Beren out of a promise he had made â€“ out of love or just courtesy Celegorm did not know. Now none would ride to aid him, for they all knew that they too would be spent. And so the doom would fall.

'Orodreth is worried.' Celebrimbor's voice came softly from the shadows.

'Yes.'

'He would urge the people to find Finrod.'

'And the people will not be urged.' Celegorm bent his hand; it was so cold that he could not touch his fingers to his palm without

shivering.

'You could,' said Celebimbor. 'You could urge them. They listen to you.'

'It would be folly.'

His father stood by the blazing ships while smoke reeled from the sleeping sea. Fire crackled and wood popped. Sparks touched the shore, threatening to light the grass that lay softly. And there Curufinwë collapsed against Tyelkormo and, with trembling arms and a quivering throat, dragged him down onto the fresh soil of Middle-earth. 'I've killed him! I've killed him!' he muttered, he screamed. His fingers scraped down Tyelkormo's back. Shaking, he covered his face with his hands; blood lay beneath his nails, dark and crusting already. 'My God, I've killed him.' His voice was so high it was unrecognisable. He was weeping, and his nose was running. He kept choking.

Their father was urging them on. Tyelkormo tried to force Curufinwë up, but he screamed. Tyelkormo gagged him with his hand, and Curufinwë bit down to the bone. Tyelkormo held him until he felt his ribs push inwards and almost cave.

Then Maitimo was standing above them. 'Get up, get up,' he was saying. 'I know not what father will do.'

Maitimo seized Curufinwë by the shoulder and pulled him to his feet, but he collapsed down again and lay quivering on the earth. Stooping, Tyelkormo lifted him into his arms like a babe. Curufinwë's heart was fluttering; Tyelkormo was afraid it would stop.

Celebimbor was standing not far off, watching in silent fear. Maitimo saw him and ran to him. He took him by the shoulder and dragged him away from his father. 'Come, little one,' he said. 'Come with me.'

Tyelkormo followed the others with weary steps. The blood from his bitten hand was flooding warm against Curufinwë's leg. Curufinwë pressed his face against Tyelkormo's chest, but his words rang clear. 'My little brother!' he cried. 'Oh, God! Oh, God! Someone kill me!'

Celegorm looked up at Celebimbor. Dark haunted his face, leaving only his ghostly hands visible by his sides. 'None can help him,' he said.

'You could try.'

Celegorm shook his head slowly. 'I am going to try to live. It may be that Læthien will grow to love me, and then I shall find some comfort there. If she does not, but still weds me, then I shall be allied with Thingol and become mighty in Middle-earth.'

'And do you want love or power?' Celebimbor asked.

'I want both,' said Celegorm. 'For they are the same. Both bring a high â€œ a mental imbalance that many would die to experience.'

'I see,' said Celebimbor, and he slipped away.

The river ran unseen.

* * *

><p>Curufin could hear the wind as he lay in bed. Night had come â€“ if you could call it night. The shadows were no darker, and the lanterns still glowed. Outside, he was told, the sun had hidden herself, and Fingolfin's moon glowed monstrous in the sky, blocking stars with his bloated, pimpled face. But here he could not tell. Another day had slipped past in waiting. The people murmured for their king while they sat in his shelter and ate.</p>

He imagined they would weep when their king was dead. They would stand, weeping and wailing, and asking, 'what could we have done? What was there for us to do?'

There was a tap on the door, and his wife said, 'Good night, Father.' No, it was his son that spoke. But he had her voice â€“ that soft catch before the last syllable. His wife was not there. She had chosen to stay with her sister and her sister's family. She had cried when their son had clutched his hand, but she had not stopped him. She had not stopped either of them. He imagined she wept later and said, 'what could I have done? What was there for me to do?'

'Good night,' he answered, then, 'wait. Come here. I want to see you.'

Celebrimbor stepped into the room. He carried a lantern that illuminated his face from below. It looked starved; his cheeks were hollow.

'You should eat more,' Curufin whispered and held his hand out to him.

Celebrimbor came to him and took his hand. His fingers were warm and strong. He touched his father's knuckles, stroked them. 'I do.'

'More. You cannot already be eating more than you do.'

Celebrimbor smiled slightly. He had Nerdanel's smile, her dimples. Curufin kissed his hand. 'I love you,' he said.

Celebrimbor bowed his head and left in silence. He closed the door, and Curufin was left in darkness.

Curufin lay his head on his pillow. Through his whole body the river vibrated; it roared in his ear and made him feel as if he were drowning. He often thought that he was as it hummed incessantly, forcing memories of the rocking boats. He felt as if someone had taken the whole river and forced it inside his veins where it coursed, driving him open.

He was cold. He got up and found an extra blanket, and then put a sweater on over his nightshirt. He was still cold, but he did not know of a remedy.

He thought of Finrod and the first time he had lifted him into his arms. He had been fresh then â€“ the newest thing in the world, all

pink cheeks and golden down. He had caught Curufinwë by the finger, stared up into his eyes.

Another time, with Ælofinwë and Arafintwë's families, he had visited Alqualondë where the beach lay white, dotted with gems, beside the turquoise sea. Findarëto had held himself high in his arms and watched the world curiously as Curufinwë carried him off to play. The light of the Trees had been mingling, and he had seen silver and gold spark in his eyes.

'I want to tell you a secret,' Findarëto had said. 'But you can't tell anyone.'

'I won't.'

'Promise?'

'I promise. What's your secret.'

Findarëto had looked up at him with a serious expression. 'I want to know everything,' he had said gravely.

'What do you mean?' Curufinwë had asked him. He had stood in the water while the waves rushed at his legs.

'I want to know everything about everyone. I want to know what they feel, and why they feel it.' He had smiled a little rosebud smile.
'You look like your father.'

'I know,' Curufinwë had said. 'That is why they call me little father.'

Findarëto had stared at him, titled his little baby face to one side. 'Does that bother you?'

Years later Curufinwë had stood on that beach again. But then the sea had been dark, and the sand glowed orange beneath torches. The gems were still there, glinting. It was on that beach where he had first lifted his sword for use and come to know the true meaning of the blade he had forged, singing.

The first strike he made was to cut an arm off. It was easier than chopping wood. The Teler and he had stared at each other in surprise. Then he had cut off his head. He had never imagined it was so easy to dismantle a body. If you did not think about what you were doing, it would be fun. But that was not entirely possible, for if you truly did not think of what you were doing, you would be dead within a minute. Curufinwë always knew.

In the dark, the door opened and then closed again. Curufin heard bare feet pad across the floor.

'Celegorm?' he whispered.

'Yes, it is I.' The mattress dipped as his brother seated himself. A hand pushed his hair back, and a thumb brushed his eyebrow. 'I could not sleep, and the river was laughing.'

'It always laughs.'

'Yes. I suppose we should be glad that at least something in this world is merry.'

Celegorm pushed down against Curufin's shoulder, forcing him to lie on his back. He touched his lashes and his lips with his finger, parted his lips and traced his teeth.

'Yes,' Curufin said against his finger. 'At least something is.'

Celegorm bent and pressed their faces together â€“ forehead against forehead, noses lined up, one and then the other, mouths touching at the corners. He slipped both arms beneath his little brother and held him tight against him.

'If I die,' he said.

'Don't say that,' Curufin muttered against his cheek.

'If I dieâ€' '

'If you die, then I wish to die with you.' Curufin kissed him. It was an open kiss â€“ not a kiss you would give your brother in the Undying Lands where there was light and warmth and gentle promises. This was a kiss for a mortal world where lives ended suddenly in the dark, in the cold. This was a kiss for a world where promises raped you. This was a kiss he had seen men give each other in battles. It was a death kiss. Only, neither of them was dead. Celegorm kissed him back, breathing steadily. He pressed his hand down on Curufin's until Curufin's fingers split apart.

Their teeth knocked together, sending vibrations up into Curufin's skull. Celegorm pressed down harder onto him, and the pillow curved up around Curufin's face, engulfing his cheeks. He struggled to breathe, and Celegorm broke the kiss, and then pressed another one down against his lips, his cheek; he covered his face with kisses one after the other. 'I love you. I love you. I love you,' he said. He pressed kisses upon his little brother's temple, upon his forehead. He could feel his skull, the skin slipped on it from the pressure of each kiss.

He paused, looking down at Curufin â€“ the only light in the room came in slits around the door, so he only saw bits of him, his quiet eyes and pinched nose, in the dark â€“ then kissed his mouth again. Curufin's head tilted backward, and he caught at Celegorm's shoulders. He looked so much like FÃ«anor.

FÃ«anÃ¡ro had been shattered the day he died. He had lain trembling; half his face burnt white, his hair was falling to ash â€“ a sickly grey dust upon his neck. His right hand was burnt, and his left hand hacked in two. But still he was proud, and still he cursed.

Tyelkormo had looked upon him, too tired to cry. He saw the very moment he died. He knew what it was, for FÃ«anÃ¡ro's spirit rushed from his body like flames from his bright eyes, and he left only dust behind him, which the wind swept from them as their father, too, became a memory. The earth lay beneath them uncaring, and the stars lay above unreachable.

Fā«anĀ;ro's hands and pulled them off him. Now they were both whole â€“ the long, spider-like fingers were smooth and untouched, neither burnt, neither split. Tyelkormo's hands slipped down, and he seized Fā«anĀ;ro's wrists. They were too small and felt frail. He gripped them tightly, shoving them down above Fā«anĀ;ro's head. 'I hate you,' he whispered. 'Do you understand?'

Fā«anĀ;ro nodded, and Tyelkormo kissed him again. He bit his lip and tasted iron. Fā«anĀ;ro cried in his throat.

'Damn you, damn you,' Tyelkormo hissed.

Fā«anĀ;ro's eyes flew wide and round. They were larger than he had remembered, not as bright. He pressed a hand against Fā«anĀ;ro's throat, feeling the muscles of his oesophagus like hills beneath his palm. 'Do you have any idea what you have done?'

Fā«anĀ;ro pushed up against Tyelkormo's shoulder with his left hand. He was forming words in his throat, but Tyelkormo choked them down. Fā«anĀ;ro drew in a breath that shuddered in his lungs and made his body reel. He formed another word. He was calling him by a name he did not know. 'Celegorm, Celegorm,' Fā«anĀ;ro said.

Tyelkormo was not Celegorm. He did not know why his father called him that. He hated it. He did not want to hear it. He wrestled Fā«anĀ;ro over and shoved his face down against the pillow. He pressed upon the back of his skull. Fā«anĀ;ro sucked at the pillow, trying to find air. His body convulsed beneath Tyelkormo. A sob rose from the back of his throat and turned into a squeak.

Tyelkormo seized him by the hair and pulled his head up.

'Why?' he asked. 'Answer that, and I'll let you live.'

Fā«anĀ;ro was standing against the wall of the palace while Ā'olofinwĀ« knelt, lacing FindekĀ;no's shoe. Neither of them saw Tyelkormo where he sat cross-legged in the doorway tossing the bracelet his father had made for him from one hand to the other. He had been bored, and was hiding from his mother.

'He's beautiful,' Fā«anĀ;ro said, and Ā'olofinwĀ« turned in surprise. 'May I hold him?'

Ā'olofinwĀ« placed a hand upon FindekĀ;no's shoulder. He said, 'I did not see you there, Fā«anĀ;ro,' but even then Tyelkormo knew that it meant that he did not want him to, but was too afraid to say so.

Fā«anĀ;ro smiled at him, just slightly, and held his hand out to FindekĀ;no. 'Come here.'

Ā'olofinwĀ« released his grip, and FindekĀ;no practically ran to Fā«anĀ;ro, who grabbed him by the arms and lifted him. He held him above his head and looked up at him. 'So pretty,' he said and dropped him.

FindekĀ;no did not scream, but Ā'olofinwĀ« did. He could not reach him in time. FindekĀ;no fell in the golden light while his white shirt rippled around him. He cried when he hit the stone floor â€“ big, hot tears that glowed orb-like on his cheeks. Fā«anĀ;ro dropped

to his knees beside him, patting him, touching him, asking him if he was all right.

Ã'olofinwÃ« snatched FindekÃ;no away, pressed his baby against his chest. 'How could you?'

'It was not on purpose,' FÃ«anÃ;ro said. 'I swear. I am sorry. I am so sorry. I did not meant to hurt him.'

Tyelkormo had never heard him apologize before, nor did he ever after.

There was a gasp for air, and then the darkness quavered with Curufin's sudden scream. Celeborn shoved Curufin back against the pillow and threw himself on top of him, grinding his weight down to keep him still. The scream still echoed, falling back upon him like a mallet.

'Hush, hush,' Celeborn whispered. He kissed his brother's hair and ear. Curufin's head was sidewise on the pillow. His cheek was wet, and strands of his hair were stuck to it. His breath came out in sobs.

'Don't kill me, don't kill me,' he gasped. 'Please, I'll do anything. Don't kill me. Oh, God. Oh, please. What do you want? I'll give it to you.'

Celeborn pulled him over, cradling his thin body against his; he could feel the ribs on his back through his shirt. He kissed his eyes gently. 'Hush, baby, hush,' he said over and over until Curufin stopped shivering. 'Hush.'

'What do you want?' Curufin asked.

Celeborn kissed his forehead. 'I want the world,' he said. 'That's what I have always wanted.'

Curufin swallowed. He lay still in his brother's arms, afraid to move. 'I thought you would kill me,' he said. 'Because of what I told you. Because of what you said. I thought it was suicide. Murder and suicide. You were going to kill me.'

'No,' Celeborn murmured, kissing his bruised wrists. 'I cannot kill you. I cannot kill either of us, for we are already dead.'

Curufin said nothing. Celeborn could still feel his heart rattling in his wrist. 'Hush,' he soothed. 'You're all right now.'

The throb of the river was the only sound in the darkness where they lay; their breath was lost beneath it.

Finally, Curufin spoke: 'No one came when I screamed.'

'No,' said Celeborn. 'There is no rescue. Not for us. Not for him.'

'Then we live damned.'

'Yes.'

Curufin shivered and pulled the blankets about him. 'I do not wish to die.'

'Then live, brother mine,' said Celeborn. 'At least we have Nargothrond.'

The shadows trembled, and the river laughed.

End
file.